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IN THE  
STATE OF NEW YORK



NEW YORK

1921



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ITS  
HISTORY, AIMS  
AND  
REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP



BY  
WILLIAM STURGIS THOMAS, M. D.

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## WASHINGTON

First President-General of the Cincinnati



## ORIGIN



THE Society of the Cincinnati was formed at the close of the Revolutionary War by commissioned officers of the regular army, for patriotic, beneficent and social purposes.

The struggle for American independence was already won by the spring of 1783 when the army lay cantoned in their log huts among the hills beside the Hudson River, in the vicinity of New Windsor, New York. Here they waited for news of the conclusion at Paris of the treaty of peace with Great Britain. The American militia had been called to service for the last time and were long since returned to their homes. The regular army, or Continental Line, were about to disband. Eight years of warfare were ended,—the best years of the lives of many of the men and officers, and the most fateful. They were not unaware of what had been achieved in the world's history. They knew that an empire was born, founded upon the newly awakened principles of liberty and equal opportunity under the law. It seemed fitting to the officers of the army to resolve with each other, before they parted, to keep alive the ideals for which they had fought and suffered. And so they banded themselves together into a fraternal fellowship, under an agreement or compact which they styled The Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati. It possesses the spirit of the Mayflower Compact and that of the Declaration of Independence, and opens thus:

### INSTITUTION

It having pleased the Supreme Governor of the Universe, in the disposition of human affairs, to cause the separation of the Colonies of North America from the domination of Great Britain, and after a bloody conflict of eight years to establish them free, independent and sovereign States, connected by alliances founded upon reciprocal advantages, with some of the greatest princes and powers of the earth.

To perpetuate therefore, as well the remembrance of this vast event, as the mutual friendships which have been formed under the pressure of common danger, and in many instances cemented by the blood of the parties, the officers of the American Army do, in the most solemn manner, associate, constitute and combine themselves into one SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, to endure as long as they shall endure, or any of their eldest male posterity, and in failure thereof, the collateral branches, who may be judged worthy of becoming its supporters and members.

The officers of the American Army having been generally taken from the citizens of America, possess high veneration for the character of that illustrious Roman, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, and being resolved to follow his example, by returning to their citizenship, they think they may, with propriety, denominate themselves the Society of the Cincinnati.

The following principles shall be immutable, and form the basis of the Society of the Cincinnati:

An incessant attention to preserve inviolate those exalted rights of human nature, for which they have fought and bled, and without which the high rank of a rational being, is a curse instead of a blessing.

An unalterable determination to promote and cherish, between the respective States, that union and national honor, so essentially necessary to their happiness, and the future dignity of the American empire.

To render permanent the cordial affection subsisting between the officers. This spirit will dictate brotherly kindness in all things, and particularly extend to the most substantial acts of beneficence, according to the ability of the Society, towards those officers and their families who unfortunately may be under the necessity of receiving it.

The name, the objects and the ideals assigned to it by its founders, are still held by the Society and are guarded as sacred heritages. Ohio's second largest city of today is named after this American Society whose members followed the example of the illustrious Roman and invoked his surname to be their inspiration.

### **OBJECTS OF THE FOUNDERS**

In the first years of its existence the Society was criticized as tending to found an hereditary aristocracy. The insinuation is answered in part by the words of the Institution above quoted. What the founders aimed at was some bond which would still unite those who had shared the hardships of camp and the dangers of the battlefield, and who were about to separate, many of them penniless, with homes ruined and families dispersed or dead. They sought the means of providing for the necessities of the more <sup>un</sup>fortunate of their number and of their widows and orphans. They wished their children to inherit and keep alive the friendship of the fathers, and devotion to their ideals. Criticism of the Society came largely from those for whom had been obtained a country and field for their ambition, without their having had to undergo the dangers and privations of military service in the war. In further refutation of these

critics, it may be recalled that General Washington was the first to sign the roll of members and remained at the head of the Society as its first President-General until his death in 1799.

The full list of Presidents-General, with their dates of tenure, follows :

1783 General George Washington, Commander-in-Chief, Virginia.

1800 Major-General Alexander Hamilton, New York.

1805 Major-General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, South Carolina.

1825 Major-General Thomas Pinckney, South Carolina.

1829 Major-General Aaron Ogden, New Jersey.

1839 Major-General Morgan Lewis, New York.

1844 Brevet-Major William Popham\*, New York.

1848 Brigadier-General Henry Alexander Scammel Dearborn, Massachusetts.

1854 Honorable Hamilton Fish, New York.

1896 Honorable William Wayne, Pennsylvania.

1902 Honorable Winslow Warren, Massachusetts.

\* Last Continental officer of the Revolution to hold the office.

Membership in the Society was shared by officers from France who served in the American Revolutionary Army, as well as by the commanders in the French Army and Navy who participated in the war as our allies.

## **GENERAL SOCIETY AND STATE SOCIETIES**

In order to facilitate personal association and intercourse in those days of primitive means of travel, the General Society was divided into state organizations, one for each of the original thirteen states of the United States of America. Each state association sends five delegates to the meeting of the General Society of the Cincinnati, which is held once in every three years. The triennial assemblages occur successively in the several thirteen states. The State Societies meet several times in each year. That of New York holds a stated meeting on Cincinnati Day, May tenth, and an annual meeting on the Fourth of July. A banquet occurs on Washington's Birthday and on November twenty-fifth there is a luncheon to celebrate the evacuation of New York by the British in 1783.

## **. FUNDS**

At the time of the foundation of the Society, each member contributed toward the permanent fund of his state body, a sum of money equal to one month's army pay. This fund has been kept intact

in New York and the interest from it used in part to contribute toward the support of widows and orphans of deceased members who may be under the necessity of receiving aid. Persons admitted to the New York Society in the right of officers who signed the roll as original members are not required to pay any fee, since their contribution has been already paid. Those admitted by right of descent from Revolutionary officers whose services secured to them the right of eligibility, but who did not join the Society, are required to contribute a sum equal to one month's pay of their respective officer ancestor.

The following pay table for infantry officers of the Continental Line was adopted by the Congress on May 27th, 1778:

Rank	Pay per month
Colonel	\$75
Lieutenant-Colonel	60
Major	50
Captain	40
Captain-Lieutenant	26 $\frac{2}{3}$
Lieutenant	26 $\frac{2}{3}$
Ensign	20
Surgeon	60
Surgeon's Mate	40
Paymaster, taken from the Line, and to receive in addition to his line pay	20
Quartermaster, taken as above and paid as above	13
Adjutant, taken as above and paid as above	13

There are no dues or assessments required of members of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New York.

### **REVOLUTIONARY ARMY SERVICE**

Right to membership in the Society was defined by its founders to exist in officers of the Line (regular army), holding commissions from the Continental Congress, who were in any of the following classes:

(a) Those in service at the time of the institution of the Society in May, 1783.

(b) Those officers previously deranged (retired) by act of the Continental Congress.

(c) Those who served three years as commissioned officers of the Continental Line.

The Institution provides, in the case of officers who died as such, in service during the war, that, as a testimony of affection to their memory and to their offspring, their eldest male branches shall have the same right of becoming members, as the children of the actual members of the Society. The Institution has always been construed as including among the officers entitled to membership, those of the Navy and Marine Corps.

## **PERPETUATION**

In order to perpetuate the Society, its founders made provision that the right of membership should descend through their eldest male posterity, or, in failure thereof, through the collateral branches who might be judged worthy of becoming its supporters and members. In certain cases, Revolutionary officers who were eligible to join the Cincinnati were prevented from doing so from one cause or another, but the right to membership created by their army service in each instance, is transmitted to their posterity in the same manner as in the case of officers who signed the roll as original members, except for the deficiency of the month's pay. A right to membership can be represented by only one person at a time, and any one person can represent but one right. In case an individual inherits two rights, it is the custom of the Society to sever them and pass one to the next person in line of succession.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP**

Qualifications for eligibility to membership in the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New York are today as they were defined by the founders and are personal and hereditary in character. In order to be elected to membership, one must be of lawful age, a gentleman and a man of honor, in sympathy with the interests of the community in general and of the Society in particular. The hereditary requirement calls for descent by male primogeniture from an eligible Revolutionary officer. No waiver in another person's favor of a right to membership is permitted in New York. In case a man, otherwise eligible to be admitted to membership in this State, is unworthy, or fails to exercise his right to become a member, that right remains dormant until his death, when it passes to his heir, as is explained herein.

## DESCENT

In case a member has daughters but no son, his birthright of eligibility descends through his eldest daughter who bears a male child, but if the said member should have brothers, it would be the next eldest of them through whom the descent would pass, or if no brothers and there is another male line from the original member, the right passes to it, in order that the hereditary right should be kept in the male line and retain the surname as far as possible. In case of the descent passing through a daughter, the right would remain dormant until her eldest son attained his majority. In case of the direct lineage of an original member, both male and female, becoming extinct, the eligibility in that right passes to the member's eldest male collateral descendant who may be judged worthy. The word "collateral" is thus defined in the Century Dictionary:

Descending from the same stock or ancestor (commonly male) as another, but in a different line: distinguished from *lineal*. Thus, the children of brothers are *collateral* relations, having different fathers, but a common grandfather.

In 1884 the General Society adopted the following resolution:

"RESOLVED, That the General Society conceives the true interpretation of the Institution regarding the descent is that the Original Member is to be considered the *praepositus* from whom the succession is to be derived, and that the collateral branches are those collateral to the Original Member, and the succession should be through females, until all the male lines have become extinct."

The Institution provides for the election of honorary members in the following words:

As there ~~you~~ are, and will at all times be, men in the respective States, eminent for their abilities and patriotism, whose views may be directed to the same laudable objects with those of the Cincinnati, it shall be a rule to admit such characters as Honorary members of the Society, for their own lives only.

Among the names of those who have been hereditary or honorary members of the Society, are found those of Washington, Lafayette, Franklin, Hamilton, Knox, Rochambeau, Steuben, D'Estaing, de Grasse, Schuyler, Bainbridge, Hull, Macdonough, Dewey, Andrew Jackson, Winfield Scott Hancock, Oliver Hazard Perry, Hamilton Fish, Grant, Cleveland and Roosevelt.

## INSIGNIA

The insignia of the Society is a gold and enamel eagle suspended by a ribbon of blue, edged with white, to signify the alliance of France with the United States of America. The order bears, among other symbolic designs, the figure of Cincinnatus and the motto, "*Omnia reliquit servare rempublicam*". The whole was designed by a French officer of engineers serving in the American Army, Major L'Enfant, who afterward laid out the plan of the city of Washington as it exists today. Some of the original eagles, made from dies cut in France, are still to be seen worn by members at their meetings. The order is recognized and honored in foreign countries.

## AIMS AND IDEALS

The aims of the Society are the same today as they were yesterday and the same yesterday as they were a century and a third ago. Though in the natural course of events it may be that the already ancient fraternity is doomed to gradual extinction as the Colonial blood of the nation becomes more and more diluted in the melting pot, yet until the last State Society of the Cincinnati has disappeared, it should remain a living monument to the deeds and heroism of the brave men who founded the Republic, a link with the past and a proud heritage of those men whose ancestors bought their right to be its members with their blood and suffering. When the founders said that the Cincinnati should be one society of friends, they laid down a principle which has become an influence for cordial relations through successive generations of members and is a living force today.

The ideals for which the Society stands are in sharp contrast to the distrust, the selfishness and the lust for power which have infected many social groups who seem to have forgotten what patriotism is in these restless days following in the wake of the World War. This one society of friends does not seek to attain domination in the land, but rather seeks liberty under the law and justice for all. Its founders had in their hands the arms and power which would have made it easy for them to usurp the military and political control of their country, but, when their task was accomplished, they laid down their arms and returned to peaceful occupations. In their role as leaders in the enterprise of welding the Colonies into a free and independent nation, they helped in awakening a spirit of liberty which has penetrated to every corner of the earth.

Founded before the Constitution of the United States was written, and possessing patriotic memories and ideals, the Society of the Cincinnati has a claim upon the interest of all Americans and particularly upon those whose forefathers were associated with its origins. Membership in the Society is looked upon as an honor, but the hereditary succession to eligibility is an accident of birth and carries with it no certificate of personal worth. Such heredity does carry with it, however, certain obligations which may not be lightly disregarded. Among these is the call to stand forth and permit oneself to be counted with public-spirited citizens. Americans who love their country and who find themselves to be eligible to membership in the Society of the Cincinnati, will not withhold their response to the call to participate with that order in its endeavor to keep alive a spirit which will tend to make of this nation, one society of friends. Patriotism, as a recent editorial writer has pointed out, should be more widely organized, more militant and intelligent in America.

## Officers of the Society in the State of New York

President—TALBOT OLYPHANT

Vice-President—FRANCIS KEY PENDLETON

Secretary—FRANCIS BURRALL HOFFMAN

Treasurer—THOMAS LUDLOW CHRYSTIE

Chaplain—REV. ALEXANDER HAMILTON

Surgeon—FORBES HAWKES, M. D.

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FRANCIS BURRALL HOFFMAN,

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RICHARD OGDEN.

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### Delegates.

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FRANCIS KEY PENDLETON

HAMILTON FISH

MCDUGALL HAWKES

FRANCIS BURRALL HOFFMAN

### Alternates

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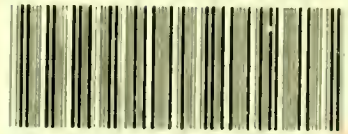




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